

Philadelphia, PA -- This evening, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-7) spoke to the Pennsylvania Chapter of CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations).

"I believe that establishing a dialogue with people is the only way to win the war of ideas. That is why I agreed to speak to CAIR," noted Joe. "It even says in the Torah, understand the other side before you make a judgment, and once you make your judgment, speak the truth. In that vein, I went to CAIR tonight to speak honestly and frankly."

"But, first and foremost, I attended tonight's banquet because 250 of my Muslim constituents attended the event," added Joe. "The American-Muslim community is a wonderful community and they have my strong support. They are among our District's leaders, and among other things, have contributed to the success of businesses, educational institutions, interfaith circles and the health sector. Their participation in civic life is indicative of the great diversity and tolerance of this nation."

Attached are the remarks Congressman Sestak gave at the banquet:

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REMARKS BY CONGRESSMAN JOE SESTAK  
IN ADDRESS TO THE PENNSYLVANIA CHAPTER OF THE COUNCIL ON AMERICAN  
ISLAMIC RELATIONS (CAIR-PA)  
The Hilton Philadelphia City Avenue  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
April 7, 2007

CONGRESSMAN SESTAK : *Assalamu Alaikum*. A very special evening....Holy Saturday, as Christians await one of the prophets in the Qur'an – Jesus – to rise from the dead. Waiting...when uncertainty causes concern...and uneasiness arises, because of the unknown. Jews, Christians and Muslims were all bred from such uneasiness as Abraham – awaiting God's promise of a son – decided to bear Ishmael before Isaac, our respective fathers.

I know that I have been waiting to come here this evening and speak with my wonderful Muslims constituents, who did so much for me in ensuring that I would represent them in our homeland of democracy. Thank you...Abu and Shelly Rahman, for the cold mornings at Swarthmore's train station and the warm events in your home; Sheikh Sidqqe, who lead the volunteers who met me at 6:00 a.m. at 69th Street station to pass out brochures at the gateway to Philadelphia; Alauddin Patwary, who organized the rallies and the many supporters in the ethnically-rich township of Upper Darby; Iqbal Mansur, who tutored me in the vagaries of economics and proved that President Truman was right when he said there are no one-arm economists, because they always seem to say: on the one hand...but on the other hand; Nina Ahmad, who led a collegium of professional women that were without peer – as was she -- on

the campaign trail; and Uwnas Hashamy, a terrific leader and member of my campaign staff....but Uwnas, I am still waiting for the 300 volunteers from West Chester University! Thank you....and thank you to all the countless other Muslim volunteers who are too many to mention this evening!

I have also been waiting to speak tonight to the experiences and principles I learned while wearing the cloth of our nation for so many years in our military, having served throughout this world. I remember *RELIANT MERMAID*, the first military exercise between an Islamic country and Israel, one that I was fortunate to oversee in the Eastern Mediterranean as the senior U.S. military officer, having earlier help plan it at the National Security Council while serving as Director for Defense Policy for President Clinton. Even today, whenever I see the crescent moon, I think of the Turkish Navy uniform, so similar to ours, but with the brilliant crescent added above the same warrior pin that I wore that day.

I learned much as I worked with the Turks and the Israelis, together....of the hope, and the reality, that comes from the willingness to talk to one another. I had already learned much of that hope and reality from working for President Clinton in the White House, who was willing to engage and talk to almost anyone – nation, individual or group...often welcoming to the White House those who were not invited before -- in the pursuit of the Prophet's order, "Spread peace between yourselves." The President believed in equal rights for everyone...in justice – the principles of *adl* – as he knew that justice is an indispensable prerequisite for peace. To reach that peace, he took courageous stands for justice by positive actions...not just words. From the strife in Northern Ireland, to sending our soldiers to defend Muslims in Bosnia, to the Middle East and the Road Map for Peace, to the question of race here at home, he engaged this world, this nation and its citizens under the Qur'an's message, "Do not let the hatred of others...make you swerve from justice." He welcomed those who had not been previously welcomed. I learned much from him.

I saw that American trait on my first command, a small ship when its first Muslim sailor reported aboard. When he requested a space to pray five times a day, an officer offered his room, stepping outside each time to let his American shipmate worship Allah. I understand that the wonder of Islam is often poorly understood and not fully appreciated despite it having so enriched the fabric of this world, of America. Prominently recognized in the U.S. Supreme Court are 18 great lawgivers of history, including the Prophet Muhammad with Moses, Solomon and Confucius. The beauty of Baroque music comes from Islamic influence; as did the "Moorish" style of some of New York's nineteenth-century synagogues.

Nevertheless, in bringing their religion into the incredible alchemy of America that takes people from all over the world and makes them into Americans, Muslims and Islam's values also become American in a unique way, by reemphasizing their religious values of human dignity; espousal of brotherhood; a belief that all are endowed by a creator; and that all are seen equal in the eyes of God. Muslims absorb what America has created in the last two centuries-plus, following Mohammed's guidance that, "Whenever you see something great, embrace it as my lost tradition." It is why I appreciate my Muslim constituents so much: they strive to be a whole part of the democratic - with a small "d" – tradition in America, simply wanting to be valued for who they are and what they bring to us, already here.

I saw that in my brotherhood of 31 years: Sergeant Abdul-Hakim, now 86 years old, fought on the beaches of Normandy that fateful D-Day of not too long ago. Sergeant Muhammad was captured by Communist forces during the Korean War and lived as a Prisoner of War for two long years. Born in the United Arab Emirates, Captain Humayun Khan, U.S Army, was killed when suicide bombers drove into a compound and instead of running, he heroically moved to prevent the vehicle from going further inside to save other Americans within.

As with President Clinton, it was not by what these Muslims said that others learned about the true message of Islam, but by what they did. Take my fellow freshman Muslim colleague, Congressman Keith Ellison, when he shook the hand of Representative Virgil Goode: it showed what Keith – his religion – espoused to be: not just a forgiving religion, but a part of making America better.

I have therefore always been struck with America's conflicted relationship with the Islamic world. Take Morocco: the first country to recognize America after our Declaration of Independence, it was also the first country to be at war with the United States. The attraction to the wonder of Islam is for its ability to transcend both culture and destruction to illuminate the rest of the world with the brightness of its goodness. Islam is, to steal a phrase, an "ornament of the world" which others copy or place upon their homegrown trees. Take my religion, particularly one of its saints, St. Francis of Assisi. He visited Jerusalem and brought back gifts: the Angelus, where Catholics are called to pray during the day after St. Francis was so impressed by the call to prayer over the minaret; and the rosary, based upon the prayer beads of the Muslim faith. St. Francis brought back Muslim piety in the form of the Angelus because he was so moved with the notion of stopping whatever one was doing several times each day to pray to a higher being, a greater good than what our own world can provide.

I was stationed at the Pentagon that fateful day six and a half years ago. In its confliction after "911", an America with a negative perception of Islam – and by implication, of Muslims – is rightly threatening to many – including me -- in wrongly reflecting who we are. We need to claim our values, not betray them, by ensuring there is not a psychology that "pulls out" of the rich fabric of our American community those who look like "one of them"...we are better than that. CAIR does such important and necessary work in a difficult environment to change such perceptions and wrongs -- from racial profiling and civil rights to promoting justice and mutual understanding -- at a time when it is challenging to be an American-Muslim and pass, for example, through an airport checkpoint. The Jewish people have passed through – and still confront – many of the same challenges, some so horrific that one gentle man was moved to write after visiting the horror of Auschwitz: "Forgive them not Father, for they knew what they did."

These memories are why I am such a strong supporter of those of Jewish faith – and Israel...and of those of Muslim faith, and a future Palestinian State in a sovereign two-state solution, side by side with Israel in peace. I have seen and learned both the grandeur....and the often cruel sacrifices...of both wonderful faiths and their people. I saw the beauty and challenges of Israel even before *RELIANT MERMAID*, having visited it at least five times. I traveled through Israel decades ago when every young couple seemed to have a pistol on the

table; and later, when every couple seemed to have a cell phone at their table. My last visit was to tie one of my U.S. Navy air defense Aegis cruisers into the missile defense network of Israel, leaving the ship stationed off its coast for the nation's protection, as I brought the remainder of my Battle Group around into the Arabian Gulf for what was expected to be the start of the Iraqi war.

And I have walked through the richness of many Islamic nations and their faithful people, including the Palestinians: my memories range from conducting the first multi-national Arab naval exercise in the Arabian Gulf; to visiting the breadth of so many Islamic countries throughout the Gulf region, in the Eastern Mediterranean and in northern Africa; of flying into Pakistan, and then into Afghanistan two months after the war there began. One must see it all to even begin to realize the rich depth of such breadth. I believe in memories; we cannot forget the Holocaust nor the Kurds, Bengalis, or Islamists in Hama Syria, or Bosnia. But when memories exceed our dreams, life is not advancing.

Winston Churchill said it so well: "It is not enough to do our best; we must do what is required." There is a larger truth that brings us all together, we descendents of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac. It is what we are waiting for: recognition that we all have a stake in solving our problems, together. As Dr. King said, "We must learn to live together as brothers, or we will perish as fools." This is the part of making America better that Muslims understand from their Islamic faith.

For while Allah demands that Muslims be just, and expects Muslims to be pious, he loves those who excel and do beautiful things....that is, practice  
*Ihsan*

. War...and the use of terror....are not beautiful, but rather, says the Qur'an, they are a corruption of God's creation, the earth. The act of corrupting the earth consists of the destruction of life, including by the prevention of peaceful coexistence: "Whoever unjustly kills a person and (in so doing so) spreads corruption on earth, it is (in the eyes of God) as if he killed all of humanity. And, anyone who saves a life, it is as if he has saved all of humanity."

We cannot abide a fear deep inside ourselves that we will never be able to see others except as the face of the harm we believe they – or their forefathers – have done. Recognizing one another's grievances is therefore a necessary first step; but assuming responsibility by taking action on the Qur'an's demand for justice so as to achieve peace is the real challenge...and where one's silence is peril. As the Qur'an says, "Stand firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin..." Therefore, as someone said in regard to cruelties committed in the name of a cause, some are guilty, while all are responsible; for if they separate us by fear from speaking, they will hold us down, undoing the lessons learned as a civilization, violating our sense of values.

This is why it is my, and your, just duty to condemn not just terrorism – as you have done – but also condemn the specific acts, and specific individuals and groups by name, associated with those acts, such as Hamas and Hezbollah. This is *Ihsan*: beautiful, since it will contribute to harmony between American-Muslims and American Jews and all Americans who confront terrorism. This is *adl*: justice against

injustice, extreme intolerance against intolerance. Otherwise, our language against terrorism remains that of silence, and not a call for the justice of the Qur'an that is a prerequisite for its peace.

It is the same for those who did not speak against the perpetrators of the Jim Crow laws, the Holocaust, or hate crimes today affecting any American-Muslim. That is the peril of silence...of not speaking to others, learned by me in a profession where lives mattered every day...and where the dignity that most counts is the dignity of danger. Where the courage to speak up – to act -- honestly despite the risks, mattered most to one's shipmates. As it does for me – and you -- today.

We need the courage to speak frankly with each other; and to then listen. I am convinced we will all find, as I have, that we have so much in common...and not just the same Father Abraham. It is therefore wrong when an issue or decision becomes an inconvenience and we avoid it, becoming less than we are. We need reflection and choice, and not accident, to achieve who we all are. This is not just what Islam is; it is who Americans are, when we hold up a national mirror to ourselves and say, "we are better than this."

*Ta'aruf* – God's creation of human beings of different tongues, tribes and beliefs, commended to intercourse and know one another – is what attracted so many Muslims to the melting pot of America as immigrants of conscience. This conscience then commands them – and us, you – to testify against those of your community who fail to act upon, or act against, those beliefs, with language that breaks the silence by condemning and disassociating yourself from them by name even if they have left the association. If there are ties to those of terror, or statements that impugn others by hate, there is an obligation to actively denounce them, against whomever they occur, including Israel.

I know, and appreciate, all you do as an advocate for justice and mutual understanding. And I believe because of the richness of the Islamic faith, the character of American-Muslims, and the ability of Americans to speak and listen to one another – and the world – that we will achieve happiness and peace through justice. It is through *Ihsan* – excellence – that we will achieve this happiness. As John F. Kennedy said in taking his definition of happiness from the Greeks, particularly in crisis: our happiness derives from the use of all of our powers along the lines of excellence. In terrorism, we face a crisis of injustice; we cannot afford a crisis of silence and acquiescence. It is through the American value of honest dialogue – reflective of the best in our Islamic and Judeo-Christian heritage -- that we will achieve excellence as one community.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. And peace be with you. *Assalamu Alaikum*.